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"MEETING  
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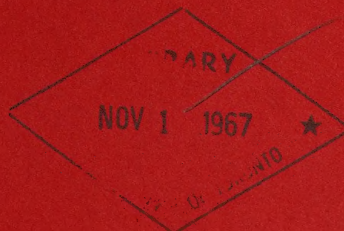


*Canada*

SPECIAL  
PLANNING  
SECRETARIAT

*(2)* From the Beat Generation;

Kenneth Bagnell







FROM THE BEAT GENERATION<sup>x</sup> - by Kenneth Bagnell

Paul MacKenzie is doing surgery in Tanganyika. Peter Boothroyd is working with Freedomites in British Columbia. Lois James is helping refugees in East Punjab. Michael Sinclair is heading adult education in part of Zambia. Lynn Pollard is on an Indian-aid project in Saskatchewan.

In a hundred places from East Preston, N.S. to Nelson, B.C. from Hong Kong to the Ivory Coast, young Canadians -- like their peace corp and civil rights counterparts in the U.S. -- are writing The End to a short chapter in our century that was popularly known as The Beat Generation, that time in the forties and fifties when it was stylish to withdraw from life into defeatism and tell sad stories of the death of society. But most important, the new young activists have -- with the same deftness in which they ended one chapter -- opened another, which may yet be called The Era of the Committed.

No one has yet -- so far as I know -- come up with any proof that this commitment is embraced by the majority of college students in North America. Perhaps many -- or even most -- are still enveloped in apathy. But it seems to me that people who become lost in arguing over whether the young activists are a majority or a minority are enmeshed in a side issue. It's a minority movement and always will be. Social change has always been the passion of minorities. A few agitate for it, a minority initiates it and the rest follow.

But it seems unquestionable to me, that we are seeing a



revolution underway among the young. In fact, it may well be that a new vocation is emerging among them -- one in which they permanently identify themselves with the losers of society. They are with the Indians in Saskatchewan; the negroes of Nova Scotia, the slum dwellers of Kingston. They are parading in front of embassies, lying down on sidewalks, digging into pockets of neglect overseas. But they are more than agitators. Increasing numbers are doing research. For example, the Student Union for Peace Action, a loosely constituted organization which once relied on demonstration, has now begun to look deeper into the causes of social unhappiness and their workers are in several Canadian slums this summer.

A number of cataclysmic forces have brought this revolution upon us. For one thing the Beat Generation was empty. The curse of death was on it from the start, for a creative mind will not wallow that long in the juices of its own cynicism. The defeatism of the Beats waned because it was uncreative. At the same time, young people wanted to be useful, even needed. But those of that day, who sought to change their society protested -- not without reason -- that the tools for changing society were in the hands of the Establishment and they were rusting from disuse. The churches and political machines they claimed, were filled with assorted change-fearers. Youth groups in the churches tinkered along with archaic machinery that the ecclesiastical top still thought workable and toyed with ideas that put activists to sleep. As for political clubs, they were merely filled with third string

establishmentarians in search of their own place in the broad-loomed comfort of the status quo. As for the universities, they too, were isolated on their own islands where things like social change were for debate, not initiation. Those were the fifties, and to most young visionaries, the whole decade was strictly Out To Lunch. As one of them put it: "If you couldn't change it and wouldn't join it, you simply withdrew from it."

Not any more. The Civil Rights revolution has proven that change can be at least initiated from outside the existing machinery, from the streets with placards, from sit-ins and ly-ins. The walls that separate men into the haves and have nots could be cracked by a power structure from the outside. Change became not merely possible, but visible. So young people organized themselves into the loose knit groups that came to be known only by their initials. It is here that they begin to differ from the liberals of the twenties and thirties who linked themselves with already existing structures of government or the emerging trade unions. Today's youth revolution is a movement of its own, and unlike youth groups of the past it is led not by the elders, but by the youth.

Again, unlike university students of the thirties, who had a clear cut liberal philosophy, today's young activists have no desire to formulate one. They are a generation of doers. They do their own research into foreign affairs, economic reform and disarmament. There are no shiny slogans or statements.



It is as if, having smelled the hypocrisy in some past pronouncements, they have decided to proceed by individual acts that bear witness to beliefs. They act first and explain later. They don't talk about the dignity of man. They seek it.

If there is one doctrine which is both the law and the prophets to them it is the right of deprived individuals to have a major voice in determining their own future. Human beings whether in East Punjab or Africville must have that vital self respect which arises out of their having played an active role in resolving their own crisis rather than being in the degraded position of being helpless recipients of someone else's goodwill. The committed young people of the sixties aren't do-gooders. They are out to change society so that people will grasp their rights for themselves. They want people to grasp their rights for themselves. They reflect the sentiments of Mr. Dooley in Finley Peter Dunne's writing who said: "Don't ask for rights. Take them. And don't let anyone give them to you. A right that is handed to you has something the matter with it."

This, of course, is the sentiment of the more radical among them, more likely to be heard from members of SNCC than CUSO, more likely to come from a leader in CORE than in The Company of Young Canadians. And if they sound abrasive, they are. They are tired of stand-pattism dressed in the guise of maturity and reason. And they may toss us more affronts in the future. For the revolution has really hardly begun. I believe the young are capable of carrying it out -- not just in this summer of their discontent, but in the summers that lie ahead.





